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ABSTRACT

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BEAUTY OR BRAINS: WHICH IMAGE FOR YOUR MATE*

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Beauty or Brains: Which Image for Your Mate?

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Abstract. Male and female subjects evaluated a male after seeing a videotape of him with his girlfriend. The attractiveness and intelligence of the girlfriend was varied. A multivariate analysis of variance on 10 dependent measures showed the male to be evaluated more favorably when his partner was more attractive or more intelligent. Univariate analysis showed attractiveness affected all of the dependent measures. Intelligence affected a more select group of attributes--talent, self-confidence, and intelligence--but affected this group about as much as attractiveness did. Intelligence and beauty have special and different places in the interpersonal marketplace.

An individual's physical attractiveness has wide-ranging effects upon the evaluations and behavior of others (Berscheid & Walster, 1974). Furthermore, benefits accrue not only to people who are physically attractive but also to those associated with the physically attractive. Sigall and Landy (1973) had subjects evaluate a male who was with an attractive or an unattractive female. Their results showed the effects of physical attractiveness "radiating" from one person to another. The male was rated more favorably when he had an attractive girlfriend and less favorably when he had an unattractive girlfriend. Sigall and Landy suggest the high visibility of beauty makes possible its radiating effects. If other characteristics such as intelligence were made as evident as beauty, they too might have radiating effects.

The present study examined how the evaluation of a male might be affected by two quite different characteristics of his partner, beauty and intelligence. Our aim was to contrast the radiating effects of a surface quality that is more internal and normally less visible. Because pretesting indicated subjects naturallly believed intelligence covaried with occupational status, occupational status was used to produce a potent manipulation of what we shall call "intelligence". Such a manipulation is of course not a pure one, but it produces a variable that is related to intelligence and is less visible than beauty.

We expected to find main effects for attractiveness and intelligence, for two reasons. First, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) would regard intelligence and beauty as "commodities" for exchange in the interpersonal marketplace; the male might be assumed to be more valuable because he had the qualifications needed to attract a beautiful or an intelligent partner. Second, there might be a perceptual confusion, or "halo" effect, arising from rating two persons who are seen as a pair, causing favorable characteristics of one person to be attributed to both.

Method

Subjects viewed a videotape showing a male and a female together. The attractiveness and intelligence of the female were varied. After viewing the tape, subjects evaluated the male. The design was a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial one, combining sex of subject, beauty of male's partner, and intelligence of male's partner.

Subjects. Subjects were 100 students participating in partial fulfillment of an introductory psychology course at San Diego State University.

Independent variables. The female was naturally attractive and for the attractive condition her looks were enhanced with makeup and fashionable clothes. For the unattractive condition, the same female wore a wig and ill fitting clothes, and theatrical makeup was used to produce shadows under her eyes, blemishes on her skin, and the appearance of a thicker nose. Pretest subjects from two psychology classes (18 males and 18 females) rated the physical attractiveness of the videotaped confederate using a 16-point scale. The female differed markedly in attractiveness in her two roles ($\bar{x}$ = 13.2 vs. 5.9, F (1,32) = 126.89, $p < .001$), with the male seen as intermediate ($\bar{x}$ = 7.2).

The "intelligence" level of the female was represented by her occupational status. Fifty-five undergraduate volunteer pretest subjects rated status and prestige of 16 occupations considered appropriate for a college age person. The three top ranked and three bottom ranked occupations were then rated by 20 additional pretest subjects according to the level of intelligence expected of a person in each of the occupations. From these ratings the occupations rated highest and lowest on intelligence--medical student and waitress--were selected to represent the two levels of intelligence.

Procedure. Subjects were escorted into the experimental room and seated in front of a videotape monitor. Each subject was told the experiment dealt with his/her perception of people. The subject was then told she/he would in the course of the experiment be exchanging information in a face to face interaction with another subject who had been videotaped moments earlier. The subject was instructed to observe the monitor carefully and take in as much information as possible. Once the tape had started, the experimenter told the subject that the female being shown was the male's girlfriend, either a coffee shop waitress or a medical student at the nearby prestigous university. There was no sound with the picture. The videotape lasted about a minute and showed the male sitting with his girlfriend and talking with an interviewer who was not visible. Each subject then moved to a cubicle and completed a questionnaire giving his/her impression of the male. Upon returning to the experimental room, each subject was asked to recall whatever information she/he could about the individuals seen on the monitor. Subjects were not prompted on what to say. Data from 20 subjects who did not spontaneously recall the occupation of the female were discarded; this was done to ensure that only subjects would be used for whom the manipulation of intelligence had been strong. This left a total of 40 males and 40 females, distributed equally among the eight conditions. Failure to mention occupation occurred approximately equally in the different conditions. Subjects were then debriefed and released.

Dependent measure. The 10 dependent measures used by Sigall and Landy (1973) were used. Subjects evaluated the male with whom they expected to interact by circling appropriate numbers on 9-point scales. On two general items, subjects indicated overall impression (from "negative" to "positive") and liking for the male. On eight descriptive adjectives, subjects indicated the degree to which they thought the male was intelligent, self-confident, friendly, talented, likeable, exciting, physically attractive, and energetic.

Results

A multivariate analysis of variance was performed on the 10 dependent measures to look for overall effects of attractiveness, intelligence, and sex of subject. There were significant effects of attractiveness, F (10,63) = 3.86, $p < .001$, and intelligence, F (10,63) = 2.02, $p < .05$, but not effect of sex of subject and no interaction among the independent variables. Univariate analyses were then performed to examine effects of attractiveness and intelligence in more detail.

Table 1 shows mean scores and univariate F ratios for effects of attractiveness and intelligence. Greater physical attractiveness of the female caused the male to be seen more favorably on all ten dependent measures. Greater intelligence of the female caused the male to be seen more favorably on three measures--intelligence, talent, and self-confidence. This cluster of three variables was affected about as much by intelligence as by beauty.

Table 1

Mean Scores and Univariate F Ratios for Effects of Partner's Physical Attractiveness and Intelligence

Dimension	Physical Attractiveness			Intelligence		
	Low	High	F[a]	Low	High	F
Overall Impression	6.1	7.3	14.95***	6.6	6.8	< 1.0
Liking	6.0	7.0	11.59**	6.6	6.5	< 1.0
Friendly	6.4	7.6	16.38***	7.1	6.9	< 1.0
Likeable	6.4	7.5	14.81***	6.8	7.0	< 1.0
Exciting	5.1	6.6	37.83***	5.7	6.0	< 1.0
Physically Attractive	5.4	6.8	18.19***	5.8	6.3	2.65
Energetic	6.0	7.1	11.03***	6.5	6.6	< 1.0
Intelligent	6.2	6.9	7.77**	6.3	6.9	5.71*
Self-Confident	6.1	7.2	7.95**	6.3	7.1	4.47*
Talented	5.5	6.1	7.51**	5.6	6.1	5.22*

[a] Degrees of freedom = 10,72

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Discussion

Attractiveness and intelligence are valued commodities; one is viewed favorably when one's partner has these qualites. Attractiveness produced more effects than intelligence, but we do not beleive this is because attractiveness was manipulated more strongly. All subjects who were used remembered without prompting how the female stood on the characteristic used to define her intelligence, and intelligence affected several items about as strongly as did attractiveness. But intelligence affected a more select group of attributes than did attractiveness.

Blau (1964) argues that prevailing social standards determine the desirability of various attributes and that attributes with the highest social values will be most desirable in the interpersonal marketplace. One might conclude that with regard to females our society places greater emphasis on the external characteristic of physical attractiveness than on more inernal attributes such as intelligence.

Beauty differs from intelligence in being a highly visible, concrete, outward attribute. Beauty is valuable in so many situations (Berscheid & Walster, 1974) that we draw numerous conclusions about the person who can attract a beautiful partner. By contrast intelligence is more elusive, abstract, and internal. Intelligence does not have the aura of beauty; its effect is more specialized. We draw fewer conclusions about the person who is intelligent or has an intelligent partner. One may need talent, self-confidence, and intelligence to gain an intelligent partner, but not many of the other things one would need to gain a beautiful partner.

Veblin (cited in Rubin, 1973) said that "attractive women enable successful men to put their prowess in evidence by exhibiting some durable results of their exploits." Men appear not to acquire intelligent women through such Veblinesque exploits. Intelligence and beauty have special and different places in the interpersonal marketplace.

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Notes

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This article is based upon a masters thesis by the first author while at San Diego State University. Requests for reprints should be addressed to Mary Lee Meiners, Department of Psychology, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia 30303.

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